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ABSTRACT

A technique designed to make the classroom use of videotapes for second language teaching for specific purposes more efficient is described. The technique begins with a classroom review of basic vocabulary and structures, which is then tested with a computer exercise. A second stage requires discussion and memorization of vocabulary and phrases within a certain subject-area field such as business, and includes examination of pictures. Aspects of the pictures are discussed, including the setting, individuals, clothing, furniture, attitudes, and actions. This second stage of language learning is also verified with computer exercises. The picture-decoding exercise provides the students with skills to decode videotapes in the third stage, focusing on language and content without being distracted by details of the pictures themselves. Finally, the students write reports with the help of the computer's word processing program, and have individual interviews with the teacher. The method integrates language, visual presentation, personal experience, and use of the computer. (MSE)

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TEACHING THROUGH INTERACTIVE PICTURES:

COMPUTER, VIDEO AND HUMAN REALITIES

André Strauss

Paper presented at a Meeting of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (20th, Brighton, England, April 1-4, 1986).

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Teaching through interactive pictures:
computer, video and human realities

The importance of pictures trying to convey ideas and concepts becomes more and more obvious; this is why it is high time for us to analyse the impact of pictures on our teaching methods. While teaching groups of students for the Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques eighteen years ago, My attention had naturally been drawn to this particular approach, and since then I concluded that it would be dangerous to let teachers use this approach without giving them the necessary instructions that will enable them to appreciate the exceptional help that pictures can bring them in their everyday work.

Indeed, pictures will lead to a negative result if they are not used properly, while they will be outstandingly positive if used correctly.

In Artificial Intelligence, we feed a lot of information into the memories of the computers and, by combining these data, we obtain a valuable result; the latter is then improved in its quality by the interference of human natural intelligence. The same process has to applied when we want to guide our students from live-pictures to an efficient wording of what these pictures convey. In fact what we want to feed into our students' memories, to provide them with the means necessary for a genuine expression of true individual value, involves two categories of languages: a) the functional language of everyday use b) the specific language corresponding to a particular field.

After feeding frequency lists of this everyday language into our computer (which we did several years ago), we choose among these expressions the ones that have some connection with the situation which is apparently shown in the two pictures we have reproduced

We have selected these two pictures because they are of course in relation with the video-cassette that we are going to use. To make things clear, here are the expressions we have selected though we might have retained far more:

Good morning! - Who is speaking? - Hold on, please - I will transfer you - I am sorry, his line is engaged - Look up the number in the directory - Excuse me, just a minute - Sorry to trouble you - Can I help you? - Sorry to keep you waiting - Have you got an appointment? - Do you have a membership card? - Please fill out this form - you have to pay a fee - Have a seat - You can borrow books for two weeks - It's a lending library - It's a reference library - Put the book back on the shelf - Keep silent, please - Which game do you wish to play? - You don't mind my smoking a cigar? - Have you read the latest news? - I really need some relaxation - How do you do? - How are you? - Pleased to meet you - I have heard of you - Apply to the reception-desk - I've time to spare - You've had your say - Don't waste your time - Help yourself to some coffee.

The above list has to be memorized and the teacher can check this memorization thanks to an exercise on a computer; I will mention, for practical purposes, an extract of the exercise which aims at verifying the knowledge of the vocabulary as well as the correct use of various structures;this exercise can of course be a closure-test or any other kind of test preferred by the teacher: but, let us remember that, at this stage of the work, the teacher wants one correct reply and allows no other choice.

Example:I was asked to...to the reception-desk - As the line was engaged, the operator told me to... - He...me waiting much too long - I would like...the matter with the director - It's no use ... my time - To get in, you must hold your membership card... - It's easy to... books from a lending-library - Help... to some coffee - I have to...you to extension 24 - I have an ... with him

at ten sharp - He objected...interfering in this discussion - I'm sorry, she isn't...this morning - ...you be late, you will not meet them.

As mentioned above, the specific language has to go through the same process, starting from our frequency-lists in the field of business, as our video-cassette deals with this particular field. The expressions selected in this list are:He is in his office - The lift(elevator) is on the right - He will be down in a minute - My documents are in my brief-case - I've to check the figures - Who is in the chair? - The Bank representative is on the Board of Directors - We make a corporate decision - He granted me a loan - They cancelled(suspended) the grant - Shareholders expect good dividends - He is worried - He looks annoyed - Assets and liabilities of the balance-sheet - Cost-price - Consult the minutes - Object to this decision - To discount a draft, I pay agios - Make new investments - Return on Investment - Make a point of being competitive - Marketing-survey - Research and Development (R. and D.) - He is in charge of the laboratory (workshop) - Cut your project - We develop a scheme - Electrovan- We use fork-lift trucks in the warehouse - Electronic components and sub-components - Economic - Economical.

It is clear that the memorization of the list above-mentioned supposes a constant dialogue with the class so as to make the concepts clear, thus stressing the fact that no concept exists if it is not expressed in words; no figures have any meaning if they are not commented in words!

This leads us naturally to the next stage, i.e. the exercise checking at once the understanding of the concepts and the correct use of the corresponding expressions.Therefore, let us quote an extract of the exercises we have fed into our computer.

Let us emphasize now the main fact, i.e., the efficient use of a video-cassette is based on picture-analysis and,further on , picture-criticism, exactly like the study of any motion-picture. The expressions we have quoted, drawn from our frequency-lists, do not obey a random-choice: this is essential .They correspond to a decoding of the pictures we have used; this decoding has two successive phases:we first examine the picture itself, including characters and background; the way the people are dressed, their attitudes, the furniture, the inscriptions we discover are just as many signs of a code which leads us to think that the young man wants to be allowed to use the library, etc.The second phase consists in injecting into the picture our personal background or, in our case, the target of our teaching process.These two phases can easily be checked, after finishing the purely language exercises , by a questionnaire in which we use the three classical categories of questions;i.e., closed questions, followed by semi-opened q uestions and eventually opened questions.The result might be:

A) I)Where is this man ? 2)Where is the operator? 3)What is there on the right of this man?

B) I)Why does this man apply to the reception-desk? 2)What do the men in the back-room do? 3)Why does the young lady raise her arm?

C) I)Why must the young man wait? 2)Why does the man in the background look annoyed? 3)Imagine the kind of documents to be found in the brief-case.

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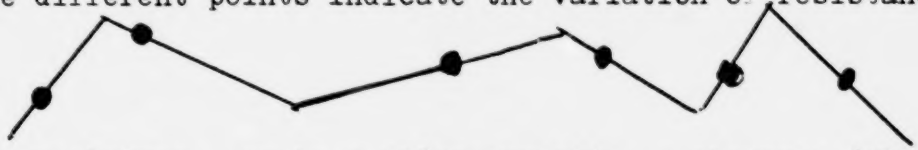
The study of the code of a picture is in the present world one of the main elements, if not the main element, of what our students, from the start, must be accustomed to.The"war of pictures" which we so often hear of on the TV, is a characteristic feature of our present time.Taken seperately, pictures can relatively easily be decoded; the Bank-Director, for instance, is dressed in blue while the engineer wears a white blouse; the same decoding process takes place in front of geometrical figures that have become of permanent use in computer-assisted design; the figure below, for instance,represents a bridge, while the different points indicate the variation of resistance.



In a motion-picture, -or in a video-cassette, - pictures follow each other so rapidly that we have no time to analyse each picture seperately:some of them are genuine photographs, but mostly, the whole film is above all the result of the editorial process which is based on pre-established associations or arrangements, so that, in fact, what we see is artificially created.As a picture necessarily conveys an impression of tangible reality, much more than words do,we are carried along by the succession of pictures and inevitably obey their logic imposed by the film-maker ;this is true for Charlie Chaplin as well as for our very recent films: the conclusion is that we have to admit that words have lost their importance and that most messages are conveyed by pictures: this involves what technicians call very properly, a "fuzzy logic", while it is our duty to teach the respect of the human thought and to get people out of this "haze" by obliging them to use a language composed of words and structures obeying a reasoned logic;we can

then inject into this reasoning the fruit of our imagination so as to obtain a message of real human and individual value. The importance of this personal reaction appears in the application of the geometrical figures we mentioned above(it's up to the engineer to embellish and improve the quality of the product with the help of his experience and of his imagination) as well as in the show-business where singers consider it of great importance to make lots of gestures and to be drowned in the light of laser-beams, rather than to insist on the words they sing. All this reveals that the picture is , to anybody, the fundamental expression of reality:this is why, it is the best support of any kind of teaching in order to make our lessons lose the merely theoretical aspect which deprived them of their communicative impact.

We are now going to turn to our video-cassette on Business-English(BBC English by television)with its excellent study of the "Bellcrest File".The pictures are coded in the way we have already described for our previous pictures and our first approach will lead to a simple decoding of what we are shown; the questions will bear on the introduction of the various characters:Who is Sir Asburnham? - Who is Mr Openshaw? - Who is Mr Needham? etc. As we said before, we will then turn to the background and ask: where are we? - What is M. Openshaw doing? What is the part played by M. Downes? etc.But after this previous decoding, we have to inject into this show our real target: teach the use of the business language:the persons that we see in the film discuss business matters, but our students who are the spectators will, by nature, be first interested in the pictures and it is interesting to note that in a class of a technical school, they will from the start be interested in M. Openshaw, very simply because he is dressed like them.

In a commercial school, they will be first interested in the case of M. Downes and M. Malone.But, in both schools, it will be necessary to let them listen to and see the film three times before they have given all their attention to the language.This waste of time can be avoided if the teacher has done his or her job correctly, i.e., taught the students how to analyse a picture and if the two phases of the language problems have lead to an effective assimilation.Indeed, if all these parameters are respected, the result will be a most pleasant surprise for the teacher as well as for the student; if we wish to pass from the picture-analysis to the picture-criticism, this surprise is indispensable.

This being achieved, we can easily carry on with the open questions that appear in the book entitled "Activity Book" and ask: "Which development-projects is M.Downes interested in?" etc. The next stage, after a series of open questions, will be to oblige the students to get in touch with several firms so as to obtain information on their diversification-problems, for instance.Such investigations will compel each student to practise real communication; then only can the role-playing start, in which propositions can be made that will be different from those made by Needham or any one else; then only, will the students really understand what kind of a person Needham is! This leads then to written reports by the students and individual interviews with the teacher.

And that's where the computer reappears: each report will necessarily contain sentences and even paragraphs corresponding to frequent situations in industry or commerce:therefore, it will allow the students to feed these texts into word-processors or rather text-processors that can be of remarkable value.

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To conclude, we can sum up our approach of the interactive picture by saying that it requires first a decoding of the picture, then an awareness of the target accompanied by personal experience and knowledge: the latter will have to be expressed by a combination of basic language and specific language, so as to lead finally, by different means suggested, to an involvement in the improvement of the solutions admitted in the video-presentation. The computer will provide the linguistic materials - both basic and specific - that have been stored in its memories; the computer will then store in its memory, for text-processing, the result of the student's wording of his or her approach to the problem. It is a closed loop.

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